





## European Neighborhood

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>THE ONLY WAY TO BENEFIT FROM THE ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT IS TO ENSURE ITS SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>Interview with Amb. Kostiantyn Yelisieiev, Deputy Head of the Administration of the President of Ukraine</i>	
<b>THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP AT THE TURN OF ITS TENTH ANNIVERSARY: WHERE HAVE WE COME SINCE PRAGUE, AND WHERE TO GO NEXT? .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<i>Pavel Havlicek</i>	
<b>TEN-POINT MEMO ON THE REVISED EASTERN PARTNERSHIP MULTILATERAL ARCHITECTURE .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<i>Hennadiy Maksak</i>	
<b>EASTERN PARTNERSHIP: WHAT OPTIONS OF DEVELOPMENT ARE NEXT FOR UKRAINE?.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<i>Oksana Dobrzhanska</i>	
<b>EAP-EU ECONOMIC INTEGRATION: WHAT IS NEXT? .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<i>Yurii Vdovenko</i>	
<b>ADVANCING THE REFORM AGENDA WITHIN THE EU ASSOCIATION AGREEMENTS: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, AND UKRAINE ON THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<i>Andrei Iovu</i>	
<b>THE EU TOWARDS RUSSIA IN THE EASTERN NEIGHBOURHOOD - MISSING THE STRATEGIC VISION.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<i>Loredana Maria Simionov</i>	
<b>WHY BELARUS HAS A DISTINCTIVE POSITION IN THE ENP.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<i>Fatih Ekinici</i>	
<b>EU-NATO COOPERATION: IS PESCO THE ANSWER TO THE BALANCE OF EU'S REGIONAL PRIORITIES? .....</b>	<b>55</b>
<i>Alexandru C. Apetroe and Daniel Gheorghe</i>	

# WHY BELARUS HAS A DISTINCTIVE POSITION IN THE ENP

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***Belarus's participation in the ENP is limited compared to other Eastern neighbours of the EU. The main reason for this is Belarus's multi-vector policy toward the EU and Russia. The EU factor affects Belarus's distance from the EU's democratic norms and values, which leads to Belarus's isolation from the ENP. The Russian factor shapes Belarus-Russia relations and also Belarus's standing in the ENP, which has positive implications for the EU-Belarus relations.***

## Introduction

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was launched after the European Union's (EU) 'big bang' enlargement. Its main aims are to stabilize the new neighbourhood of the enlarged EU and construct closer and cooperative relations with its neighbours in order to sustain its security and to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines in Europe. Even though this policy was received positively by most countries in the Eastern neighbourhood, such as Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, Belarus is the only country in the Eastern neighbourhood whose participation has become limited since its 1995 referendum.<sup>1</sup>

At this referendum, Belarus agreed to give the Russian language equal status to the Belarusian language and also aimed at economic integration with Russia. There is a strong causality between the referendum

and Belarus's participation in the ENP because it validates Belarus's distinctiveness among other Eastern neighbours of the EU, as it voluntarily did not choose the EU integration in the mid-1990s.<sup>2</sup> Beyond the referendum, the primary reason of Belarus's limitation is President Lukashenka's violation of democratic norms, values, and human rights as well as unfair elections in Belarus.

The EU's regionalism is based on European integration even if the ENP does not promise any membership to target countries. This regionalism has a strict conditionality in which European democratic norms and values are indispensable for the EU. In this context Belarus holds a distinctive position in the ENP. With a president viewed as 'the last dictator in Europe', Belarus has a reputation for being undemocratic and failing to apply human rights standards and, therefore, capable of only having partial participation in the ENP.

<sup>1</sup> For details and results of the May 1995 Referendum (by percentage), see A. Wilson, *Belarus: The Last Dictatorship in Europe*, Yale University Press: New Haven 2011, pp. 168-193.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

Furthermore, Belarus is also seen as Russia's only ally in the region even though its relations with Russia do not remain consistently at a high level. This adds another layer to the uniqueness of Belarus's position within the ENP. The EU is mostly viewed as a 'magnet', whereas Belarus's aforementioned status in the ENP makes it important to understand why Belarus maintains finite relations with the EU.

This paper will discuss the determinant factors of Belarus's distinctive status in the ENP, which are the EU and Russia. The EU isolates Belarus from the ENP due to its failure to fulfil the EU's norms and values but provides conditionality. Meanwhile, inconsistent Russia-Belarus relations are also critical for understanding Belarus's participation in the ENP. The EU and Russia factors are important because Belarus is fluctuating between the two influential actors by establishing a multi-vector policy.

## The EU Factor

The EU's conditionality to its neighbours determines the ENP's effectiveness. Belarus emerges as a unique case by not aligning itself to the EU. Contradictions with the EU's norms and values made Belarus be involved in the ENP partially since the EU's priority is democracy and protection of human rights in its neighbourhood.

*The Union's approach to partnership under the ENP therefore appears to be not of negotiation based on recognition mutual interests and values ... but strictly of conditionality and neighbour's compliance with the EU predetermined set of norms and values ... stipulated that 'our partners*

*should fulfil their commitments ... before we offer deeper political and economic integration with the EU.*<sup>3</sup>

For the EU, excluding Belarus from the bilateral contractual interaction within the ENP is primarily the result of Belarus's inability to comply with the EU's norms and values. It is significant because the EU's integration process and enlargement policy follow the same conditions. The ENP is an element of European integration without enlargement. In this context, with lack of democracy and human rights violations, Belarus's different standing in the ENP seems to be unchanged.

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***For the EU, excluding Belarus from the bilateral contractual interaction within the ENP is primarily the result of Belarus's inability to comply with the EU's norms and values***

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The EU's influence is also a decisive factor for understanding Belarus's current status in the ENP. The European External Action Service (EEAS) is seen as the EU's ministry of foreign affairs, which has a role in the EU's external relations and in the ENP. However, Kostanyan and Orbie state that the EEAS's function can be explained with the 'grand theories' of European integration.<sup>4</sup> Neo-functionalism suggests:

*Political integration is the process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded*

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<sup>3</sup> E. Korosteleva, *The Limits of EU Governance: Belarus's Response to the European Neighbourhood Policy*, "Contemporary Politics", May 2009, p. 233.

<sup>4</sup> H. Kostanyan, J. Orbie, *The EEAS' Discretionary Power within the Eastern Partnership: In Search of the Highest Possible Denominator*, "Southeast European and Black Sea Studies", January 2013, p. 48.

*to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities to a new [centre], whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over pre-existing national states. The end result is a new political community superimposed over the pre-existing ones.*<sup>5</sup>

Neo-functionalism highlights supranational institutions where sovereign entities transferred their rights to a non-state organisation. According to neo-functionalism, the EEAS is the EU's external governance institution and it operates autonomously within the EU. Nevertheless, as Kostanyan and Orbie further argue, the EU's influence in the ENP is also relevant to intergovernmentalism, according to which member states can pursue their national interests centrally within the EU and its external governance such as in the ENP. "The sui generis EEAS however operates both in the community and intergovernmental body, thus holding a double loyalty towards the intergovernmental Council, on the one hand, and the supranational Commission and EP, on the other hand."<sup>6</sup> In this context, the EU's impact on the ENP is limited and the ENP also carries member states' interest, so Belarus's participation in the ENP could also be relevant to the EU member states' reflection.

In 2009, the EU launched the Eastern Partnership (EaP). As a result, the ENP in the East became twofold. On the one hand, before the EaP, the ENP in the East was only managed bilaterally with countries that were eligible based on the EU's conditionality. On the other hand, the EaP has been pursuing multilateral regional contacts without any legal contract. The EEAS is only responsible for the EaP in which this institution solely follows multilateral track of the ENP. Belarus

was invited only to this programme. Most of the platforms of the ENP are organised and set by the Commission. It could be argued that member states contribute to bilateral relations with the neighbours. It clarifies that interests of the EU member states can be visible in the ENP. Therefore, Belarus's distinctive position can also be related to member states' lack of interest to construct positive relations with Belarus because of its undemocratic regime.

There are four thematic platforms in the ENP:

1. Democracy, good governance, and stability
2. Economic integration and convergence with the EU policies
3. Energy security
4. Contacts between people

The EEAS is only responsible for the first platform with its concern of democracy and state strength with a multilateral approach. For rest of the platforms, the European Commission sets the agenda and provides the substance with a bilateral track. In those platforms member states contribute policies, so national interests of the EU member states could be laid out in the ENP.<sup>7</sup> In Belarus's case, the EEAS has limited ability regarding this country since Belarus's distance to democratic norms and values and the EU's supranational actorness are in favour of Belarus's partial participation in the ENP. In this context, member states have a significant impact on the EU-Belarus relations and this fact gives necessity to focusing on the rest of the thematic

<sup>5</sup> E. B. Haas, *The Uniting Europe: Political, Social and Economic Forces, 1950-1957*, Stanford University Press: Stanford 1958, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> H. Kostanyan, J. Orbie, *The EEAS' Discretionary Power within the Eastern Partnership: In Search of the Highest Possible Denominator*, "Southeast European and Black Sea Studies", January 2013, p. 48.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 51.

platforms in the ENP. It is important because it also gives implications about member states' view on Belarus as a neighbour state.

Belarus is an energy transit country in the Eastern neighbourhood between Russia and the EU. The EU's energy vulnerability to Russia is clear and it also makes Belarus a significant actor for the EU and its member states despite its criticized political regime of Lukashenko.

*The Union uses both hard and soft governance to push and/or persuade Belarus to adjust to its values (democracy, human rights). Yet, very few legal, political and institutional links exist between the EU and Belarus and interaction is increasingly taking place through semi-official networks on issues of mutual interest (energy security, border control) rather than 'shared values'.<sup>8</sup>*

Giselle Bosse argues there could be a nexus between security and values in the EU-Belarus relations and the link between security and values may have a reflection on the ENP in terms of EU governance in Eastern Europe. "The Commission had already identified ... strategic importance for the EU's security of energy supply ... for an energy policy for ... its neighbours and partner countries, with a particular focus on integrating them into the internal energy market"<sup>9</sup> It is important because energy security is one of the core interests for the EU member states; nonetheless, energy security has never been a critical component in the EU-Belarus agenda. The EU's conditionality over Belarus has always been dominated by the issue of Belarus's democratic convergence based on

the EU's norms and values, which outweigh the EU's security.

On the other hand, social contact with Belarusian people bypassing Belarusian administration is the EU's other strategy. The EU does not exclude Belarus entirely because it is in the EU's interest to win the 'hearts and minds' of Belarusians so that this thematic platform may bring Belarus closer to the EU. It is important because even though there is insufficient application of democracy and human rights in Belarus, contacting with Belarusian society might be the only positive policy of the EU towards Minsk. "The EU itself appears to hamper the effect of its 'soft' governance approach towards Belarus through its lack of direct financial commitment to the Belarusian population and by having erected serious administrative boundaries to financing civil societies through ENPI."<sup>10</sup>

It is clear that the EU's transformative power has not worked in Belarusian case since Lukashenko's policies do not fit with the EU's idealism. Belarus's restricted participation has become the case. However, the EU does not neglect people in Belarus, which might also be seen as a strategy to transform Belarus according to the EU idealism. "... The Union continuously underlines the 'twin-track' nature of its approach towards Belarus, based on strict conditionality vis-à-vis the regime, and, at the same time, on the promise to support and 'win the hearts and minds' of the Belarusian population."<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that winning the 'hearts and minds' could be a long-term process, so an outcome of Belarus's positive change would not be seen under Lukashenko's presidency.

<sup>8</sup> G. Bosse, *Challenges for EU Governance through Neighbourhood Policy and Eastern Partnership: The Values/Security Nexus in EU-Belarus Relations*, "Contemporary Politics", May 2009, p. 224.

<sup>9</sup> G. Bosse, A. Schmidt-Felzman, *The Geopolitics of Energy Supply in the 'Wider Europe'*, "Geopolitics", August 2011, p. 480.

<sup>10</sup> G. Bosse, E. Korosteleva-Polglase, *Changing Belarus? The Limits of EU Governance in Eastern Europe and the Promise of Partnership*, "Cooperation and Conflict: Journal of the Nordic International Studies Association", May 2009, p. 150.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 145-146.



**Nevertheless, Belarus is not a satellite country of Russia, but it is a country that seeks to maximize its gains from Russia in an environment of Russia-West confrontation**

### **Russian Factor in Belarus's Distinctive Position in the ENP**

Belarus's distinctive status in the ENP is not only related with the EU's policies but also with Russian policy in the region. Russia's 'near abroad' approach is deeply involved in Belarus's multi-vector policy. From the Belarusian point of view, the environment in the region makes the country maximize its gains from Russia instead of the EU.

Belarus has crucial importance for Russia in terms of NATO expansion since its geographical position blocks the creation of a 'hostile belt' from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Nevertheless, Belarus is not a satellite country of Russia, but it is a country that seeks to maximize its gains from Russia in an environment of Russia-West confrontation. In this regard, Belarus's primary distinction in the Eastern neighbourhood is one of being the only state that seeks advantages from Russia.<sup>12</sup> Belarus has geostrategic importance for Russia in terms of preventing further Western institutional expansions to its 'privileged zone of interests'. Unlike in the ENP, Belarus's position in Russian foreign

policy is highly positive, and Russia's foreign policy concept confirms this fact: "Russia is committing to expanding cooperation with the Republic of Belarus within the Union State with a view to promoting integration in all areas."<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Russia sees Belarus as one of the crucial states in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in which Russia and Belarus integrate socially and economically.<sup>14</sup>

However, Belarus's positive relations with Russia do not remain consistent. Belarus's energy debts to Russia and, more importantly, Lukashenka's policies to reduce Russian impact on Belarusian domestic politics are the key reasons. Due to lack of democratic values and violation of human rights, Belarus had no significant gain from the West, so its dependency on Russia is high. It is the reason why Belarus's multi-vector policy became important to restrict Russian influence on Belarus.

Yet, Belarus has a different status in the ENP as a result of Russia's policies. This can be seen in Lukashenko's discourses when he defined Belarus's foreign policy strategy with three fundamental principles, which are political sovereignty, economic openness, and equal partner relations with other countries, and added: "The golden rule of the Belarussian foreign policy is multi-vector and interest in mutually beneficial contacts."<sup>15</sup> A gas crisis between Russia and Belarus has led the latter to start leaning towards the West and this fact also clarifies why Belarus is viewed with a

<sup>12</sup> N. Silayev, A. Sushentsov, *Russia's Allies and the Geopolitical Frontline in Eurasia*, "Russia in Global Affairs", 18 May 2017, [<http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/valday/Russias-Allies-and-the-Geopolitical-Frontier-in-Eurasia-18718> access: 06 September 2018].

<sup>13</sup> *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (Approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on November 30, 2016)*, MFA Russia, 01 December 2016, Article 50, [[http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents/-/asset\\_publisher/CptICk6BZ29/content/id/2542248](http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICk6BZ29/content/id/2542248) access: 06 September 2018].

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, Article 51.

<sup>15</sup> A. Lukashenko, *Глава государства посетил факультет журналистики БГУ (Head of State Visits BSU Journalism Faculty)*, President of the Republic of Belarus, 12 February 2008, [[http://www.president.gov.by/ru/news\\_ru/view/glava-gosudarstva-posetil-fakultet-zhurnalistiki-bgu-2750/](http://www.president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/glava-gosudarstva-posetil-fakultet-zhurnalistiki-bgu-2750/) access: 06 September 2018].

distinctive status in its relations with the EU. Sporadically deteriorated Russia-Belarus relations have an outcome for Belarusian foreign policy, which is its multi-vector policy towards the EU and Russia.

Belarus is the only country in the region to pursue its security objectives with a high level of cooperative relations with Russia. Belarus's significance increased after the Russian-Georgian war and especially peaked after the annexation of Crimea in March 2014. "For Russia, Belarus is of strategic importance, not only as a transit (and cheap) territory for passing its goods to Europe, but also as a military ally and a link to Kaliningrad, a strategic enclave."<sup>16</sup>

Russian policy in the EU's Eastern neighbourhood has deteriorated Russia's bilateral relations primarily with Georgia and Ukraine, so those countries aligned their policies with the EU and NATO to reduce their vulnerabilities to Russia. Under the impact of the Transnistrian conflict, Moldova has also committed itself to the EU to escape from the Russian influence. In addition, Ukraine was the most important country for Russia since Russia's Black Sea Fleet's presence was dependent on Ukraine's permission until the annexation of Crimea. As a result of the aforementioned developments with those countries, Belarus has become the single country to mostly align itself with Russia. Yet, Belarus's position towards Russia is ambiguous, even though Belarus is considered as Russia's most loyal ally. Arbatov describes Russia's

European 'near abroad' environment: "In the European part, Russia is bordered by not very friendly countries such as Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, the Baltic States and not very predictable partners such as Belarus."<sup>17</sup> This fact signals that Belarus-Russia relations do not consistently remain at an advanced level, which has an impact on Belarus's position in the ENP.

Lukashenko's reaction to the Russian policies towards Belarus has not always remained positive due to the fact that he intends to protect his strength within Belarus and maintain Belarus's sovereignty as much as possible. Lukashenko's block against Russian propaganda in his country, in the early 2018, before the Russian presidential election might be a valid indicator that Lukashenko is trying to keep his sovereignty against Russia as Russia's other neighbours do.<sup>18</sup> In this context, worsening of Russia-Belarus relations unsurprisingly brought Belarus closer to the EU. With the Russia-Belarus gas crisis, Belarus had a reason to lean towards the West because of aggressive Russian foreign policy in the region.

*Nor is it the result of changes in Belarus's domestic policies, as there have been no major alterations there. Rather, attempts to normalize relations with the West and Belarus are direct consequence of events that happened not in Belarus, but in neighbouring Ukraine. As early as March, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko started to position Belarus as a neutral country.*<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> E. Korosteleva, *The Limits of EU Governance: Belarus's Response to the European Neighbourhood Policy*, "Contemporary Politics", May 2009, p. 236.

<sup>17</sup> A. Arbatov, *Collapse of the World Order?*, "Russia in Global Affairs", 20 March 2018, [<http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Collapse-of-the-World-Order-19442> access: 07 September 2018].

<sup>18</sup> P. Goble, *Like Its Neighbours, Belarus Seeks to Block Russian Propaganda*, "Jamestown Foundation: Eurasia Daily Monitor", 16 January 2018, [<https://jamestown.org/program/like-neighbors-belarus-seeks-block-russian-propaganda/> access: 07 September 2018].

<sup>19</sup> A. Iskandaryan, *Playing Its Own Game: Belarus as a Peacemaker between Russia and the West*, "Russia in Global Affairs", 30 October 2014, [<http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/book/Playing-its-own-game-Belarus-as-a-peacemaker-between-Russia-and-the-West-17069> access: 07 September 2018].

It could be argued that Belarus has been trying to construct positive relations with the EU incoherently in specific times. In addition, negative Russia-Belarus relations were the dependent variable of Belarus's distinctive standing in the ENP. To elaborate on this point in terms of Russia-Belarus relations before the annexation of Crimea, Belarus sought to maximize its gains from Russia, which were mainly cheap gas and energy subsidies. In contrast, Belarus preferred to establish its position as a neutral state in the Russia-Georgia war and in the Ukrainian crisis, although its return could be in favour of Belarus significantly if Lukashenko preferred to support Russia in those cases.

The economy of Belarus is asymmetrically dependent on Russia. Russia could use this asymmetry to pressure Belarus when it is necessary for Russian interests. Lukashenko's reaction to the Russia-Georgia war did not please Russia since Belarus did not recognise Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. In addition, Lukashenko freed political prisoners, including his former political rival, Alexander Kazulin. These developments resulted in a positive response from the EU. It softened the attitude towards Belarus by abolishing visa sanctions against Lukashenko and formally invited Minsk to join the Eastern Partnership programme.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, the Russian factor was also a significant determinant for Belarus's relations with the West. In the aftermath of the Russia-Georgia war, Belarus's position led Russia to set policies to pressure Belarus using coercive means. In other words, it could be seen that

Russia punished Belarus for its clashing policies against Russia. For instance, Russia banned dairy imports, which are seen as the backbone of Belarusian economy, from Belarus in 2009, and this pressure followed with a gas cut-off in 2010 because of energy debts of Belarus.

Nevertheless, the 2010 elections in Belarus were assessed negatively by the EU, since democratic values are the primary element for the ENP. After applying economic sanctions to Belarus, Russia had the opportunity to pull Belarus back into its sphere of influence because Belarus faced a severe economic crisis. Belarus had to desperately accept deeper integration with Russia. Examples such as the Common Economic Space Agreement, Union State, and Gazprom's acquisition of 100% of Belarusian gas pipeline operator – Beltransgaz – are valid indicators to explain this fact. "Belarus's status as a transit country has always been Lukashenko's key political asset. This is not only about pipelines, although in both Russia and Belarus they are far from view; his is a policy of constant geopolitical manoeuvring between stronger neighbours."<sup>21</sup> Lukyanov's view is mostly valid, however, as the 2011 economic crisis and the post-2010 election sanctions from the EU created desperate conditions for Belarus, so Belarus reluctantly had to yield to Russia in order to overcome this economic crisis.

After the annexation of Crimea, geopolitical and economic settings have decreased the Russian impact on Belarus. Like in the Russia-Georgia case, Belarus aligned itself with a relatively neutral position.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore,

<sup>20</sup> Y. Drakokhrust, *The Spiral of Independence*, "Russia in Global Affairs", 25 March 2012, [<http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/The-Spiral-of-Independence-15504> access: 07 September 2018].

<sup>21</sup> F. Lukyanov, *Master of Intrigue*, "Russia in Global Affairs", 13 January 2011, [<http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/redcol/Master-of-intrigue-15092> access: 07 September 2018].

<sup>22</sup> Belarus's position in the case of Ukraine is not completely neutral when also considering Belarus's vote against UN Resolution 68/262 on territorial integrity of Ukraine. See *United Nations General Assembly Sixty-Eighth Session 80th Plenary Meeting (Official Records)*, United Nations, 27 March 2014, p. 17, [[https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/68/PV.80](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/68/PV.80) access: 27 September 2018].



***Worsening Russia-Belarus relations and a negative impact of the EU's economic sanctions push Belarus to build better relations with the EU towards what could be the peak point of their bilateral relations***

Belarus positively used its neutral status in the Ukrainian conflict to host several peace talks, including the meetings in February 2015 that led to a cease-fire. Thus, Belarus could elude the Western isolation.<sup>23</sup> In response to emphasizing its neutrality and to tackling fighters or militias flow from Belarus to the conflict in Ukraine, when “the Belarus parliament passed a number of amendments to the country’s Criminal Code ... providing for the criminal prosecution of Belarusian citizens who fight in Ukraine on either side of the front”,<sup>24</sup> Lukashenko’s standing in the crisis in and around Ukraine was welcome as unprecedentedly positive in the EU-Belarus relations history. The EU’s approach could also be argued to be a reflection of the EU member states’ interest. Russia’s annexation of Crimea has changed the European security order, resulting in positive relations with Belarus. This could make Russia lonelier in the Eastern European periphery, but peaked Belarus’s position in the ENP positively.

It is also important to underline that after the annexation of Crimea, the EU applied

economic sanctions against Russia, which decreased Russia’s economic strength. Even though Russia is relatively weak in terms of economy compared to the EU, it has a more stable economy than Belarus. However, after the annexation of Crimea, Russia’s economic superiority did not attract Belarus because of devaluation of the Russian rouble and recession of the Russian economy as a result of economic sanctions against Russia. “Now it appears to them that Belarusian leader ... is also turning toward Europe because he needs money, and ‘everyone understands that Putin [does not] have any. [Lukashenko] has refused to agree to the opening of a Russian base there, and that has left Putin in a cold fury.”<sup>25</sup> It is important because these circumstances created the opportunity for the EU to be able to keep Belarus in a neutral position, and it may even hopefully bring Belarus to the EU’s norms and values.

*...the EU needs to understand the multiple geostrategic threats to Belarus’s resilience and think how it can help the country minimize these fragilities. This means tackling the country’s vulnerability to Russian geostrategic aims in a regional context that has been fraught since Moscow’s March 2014 annexation of Crimea. The EU ... will need to offer more meaningful bilateral confidence-building measures in the security sphere and help Belarus develop its desired role as a regional neutral ground for peace and security negotiations.<sup>26</sup>*

<sup>23</sup> A. Kudrytski, R. Chilcote, *Belarus Leader Urges US Involvement in Ukraine Peace Process*, “Johnson’s Russia List”, 01 April 2015, [<http://russialist.org/belarus-leader-urges-u-s-involvement-in-ukraine-peace-process/> access: 07 September 2018].

<sup>24</sup> Y. Drakokhrust, *Whose Side Is Belarus on Anyway? Belarusians Generally Feel Closer to Russia than Ukraine but Refuse to Get Involved in the Conflict between Them. It Is, They Insist, “Not Our War”*, “Johnson’s Russia List”, 12 May 2016, [<http://russialist.org/whose-side-is-belarus-on-anyway-belarusians-generally-feel-closer-to-russia-than-ukraine-but-refuse-to-get-involved-in-the-conflict-between-them-it-is-they-insist-not-our-war/> access: 07 September 2018].

<sup>25</sup> P. Goble, *Putin Needs a Victory and Annexing Belarus on the Cheap Could Give Him One, Oreshkin Says*, “Johnson’s Russia List”, 12 November 2015, [<http://russialist.org/putin-needs-a-victory-and-annexing-belarus-on-the-cheap-could-give-him-one-oreshkin-says/> access: 07 September 2018].

<sup>26</sup> Y. Preiherman, R. Youngs, *Belarus’s Election Tests the EU’s Global Strategy*, “Carnegie Europe”, 09 September 2016, [<http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/64519> access: 08 September 2018].

Worsening Russia-Belarus relations and a negative impact of the EU's economic sanctions push Belarus to build better relations with the EU towards what could be the peak point of their bilateral relations. Lukashenko also signals that the EU-Belarus relations can be restarted in a more stable environment.

*Now that the situation in the world is far from calm, these approaches are especially valuable. It was consistent and pragmatic policy that helped us normalize and strengthen relations with Western countries. We were able to overcome differences and now we are building a new platform for cooperation based on mutual respect and a balance of interests.<sup>27</sup>*

Nevertheless, the Russian factor in the ENP should not be underestimated since the Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine cases are great references that Russia's assertive policy in the region might have destructive consequences for Belarus, if its relations with the EU will become more intense in the future.

## Conclusion

This paper focused on reasons behind Belarus's inconsistent participation in the ENP. Focusing on Belarus is important because the EU is viewed as a 'soft and civilian power' and it is an attractive entity. Whereas most of the neighbours seek closer relations with the EU, Belarus is the only country satisfied with distant relations with the EU. In terms of the ENP, Belarus is considered to be in a distinctive position because of its negatively different standing compared to other neighbours in the East.

Overall, this paper deduced that there are two factors for explaining Belarus's distinctive status in the ENP: the EU and Russia. Due to lack of democratic values and human rights violations, Belarus faced isolation from the EU in bilateral relations and the ENP. This part examined the actorness of the EU to explain the EU-Belarus relations. It figured out that member states' contribution also had an impact on Belarus's distinctive status in the ENP.

Russia is another determinant actor of Belarus's incoherent relations with the EU. Belarus has been following a multi-vector foreign policy towards the EU and Russia. Lukashenko leans his country towards the West each time he has low-level relations with Russia. This paper reasons that Belarus is reluctant to accept Russia's conditions since Belarus could not have sufficient benefits from the West due to its failure in the democracy conditionality. Additionally, the annexation of Crimea has changed Belarus's position significantly so that its neutral policies and mediator role in peace talks received an unprecedented positive reaction. In this context, the EU-Belarus relations are at the highest level and the Russian factor has an ultimate impact on it.

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